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ABSTRACT

As part of the work from the Content Area Reading Project (CARP), which focuses on inservice teacher education in content area reading, this paper provides an overview of inservice content area reading within the CARP model. The first section of the paper reviews the literature on inservice education and indicates the serious problems with traditional approaches to inservice education, particularly when it focuses on content area reading. The second section of the paper presents information on an inservice content area reading program, one providing a series of monthly inservice sessions that coordinate discussions of theory with followup activities in the classrooms. This section also presents information on the planning stages, assumptions, goals, and organization of the three-year CARP model for implementing an inservice content area reading program. (RL)

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An Overview of an Inservice Content Area Reading Program

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Inservice efforts in content area reading, like those in other areas, are frequently deplorable. They include "various kinds of one-shot 'dog and pony shows'" and are seldom built upon cooperative efforts (Dillon, 1976). These well-intended programs are frequently confounded by the assumption that exposure to an expert in the field will bring about real change. The inservice model that is described in this series of four papers, an extended program involving cooperative efforts, was designed to produce lasting changes.

Traditional Inservice Approaches

Many believe that inservice training will be the major phase of teacher education during the 1980's (Edelfelt, 1974; Pasch, 1974; McLaughlin and Marsh, 1978; Mamary, 1978). In the past, teacher training institutions were preoccupied with preservice education and local school districts struggled to accommodate increasing enrollments. In today's market, teacher training institutions must focus on inservice education and local school districts must upgrade the skills of a stable, tenured staff.

Mammary (1978) insists that traditional approaches to inservice education have produced no long term positive changes in instruction or in student learning. McLaughlin and Marsh (1978) put forward a similar view. They concluded that "the only consensus that appears to exist about staff development is that what we have now is ineffective and a waste of time. The general feeling is that most staff development programs have benefited neither teachers nor students."

Cooper and Hunt (1978) suggest that the most frequent inservice activities occur under the three main categories of staff development days, outside experts as consultants, and show-and-tell. However, these models fail to make use of what Ingersoll (1976) calls "the single most important source of information available for inservice training -- the teacher." Cooper and Hunt (1978) point out that the usual rule is for the planning and assessment to be executed by educational authorities other than classroom teachers.

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Ingersoll (1976) urges that failing to include the teacher in the decision-making process lacks sense for three important reasons:

(1) when teachers are involved at the choice point, they are more likely to carry their interest into actual training:

(2) it fails to make financial sense to offer something that has little relevance in teachers' needs; and

(3) to make all the decisions at an administrative level is little more than patronizing.

The discrepancies between the perceived needs of teachers and the perceived needs of educational authorities other than teachers has been well documented. A study by Ingersoll and Schneider (1978) found a lack of agreement between 21 principals and 219 elementary school teachers in perceived training needs. Pilcher (1973), in his study of the effectiveness of teacher centers, reported that the traditional superior-subordinate inservice role has resulted in bitterness among teachers.

Zigarmi, Betz, and Jensen (1977), studying teachers' preferences in and perceptions of inservice education, found that the sampling of 1,239 teachers rated bulletins, programs conducted by outside consultants, faculty meetings planned by administrators, and presentations by educational sales representatives as not useful. Although these traditional inservice approaches are frequently used, the authors observed that none of them build on teachers' resources or sharing.

Content Area Reading Program (CARP)

Following recommendations made by others (Campbell, 1973; Otto, 1973), a three-year program was planned for volunteer teachers, consisting of two three-hour sessions per month throughout the school year. The time was long enough to cover a wide range of topics: diagnosis, motivation, organization for instruction, reading skills development, materials selection, and evaluation of instruction.

The target group, 25 teachers of grades 4 through 10, received extra compensation for attending the training sessions. Drawing from rural and suburban communities, the school district was located in west central Pennsylvania. Workshops were held in the evenings at the junior high school. Some district administrators attended the teachers' training sessions and all participated in 5 half-day workshops designed to develop skills in the systematic observation and clinical supervision of content area teachers.

Model teaching materials -- such as learning centers, skill exercises, and videotapes -- were used to demonstrate how teachers might construct and use these materials. A professional library was made available at the site so that teachers could read assignments without traveling to a university library.

Throughout the program, one assumption was paramount: content objectives have primacy for content teachers. Reading objectives provide the tools to enable students to study content materials. Therefore, participating teachers first considered their content objectives, and then decided what reading skills were necessary for students to master content objectives. A unit approach, in which reading skills and content objectives are integrated, was the method used to implement reading instruction in content area studies.

The program's goals were to change teacher's attitudes positively toward teaching reading as part of content area subjects, to effect change in that direction in classroom practice, and to change the reading/study skills achievement scores of students taught by the content area teachers who participated in the program.

The school district had identified content area reading as a weakness among students primarily due to inadequate teaching strategies. Realizing that "visiting experts" frequently have little impact on teachers' attitudes and classroom practices (Otto, 1973), the program involved administrators, curriculum directors, and reading specialists. These personnel, as well as the teachers, assumed some of the training in the second year and all of the training in the third year.

The three year model, one in which a series of inservice sessions were scheduled over a long period of time with follow-up in the classroom, provided a number of advantages not present in previously unsuccessful inservice models. One, teachers were change agents during the final two years. Two, the minimum one-year involvement allowed enough time for teachers to design, implement, evaluate, and become comfortable with new techniques. Three, teachers were able to focus on materials and plans for their own classes. Four, non-teaching personnel were able to work with content teachers between sessions to implement new techniques.

The three-hour sessions each month not only provided enough time to cover a wide range of topics but also gave teachers ample time to plan, implement, and evaluate new techniques. The sessions were organized with the first one presenting new techniques and the second one allowing teachers the full time to develop their own materials with the assistance of the district's reading personnel. This aspect of the inservice program gave district reading teachers valuable experience as resource teachers. Elementary and secondary content teachers began to turn to these resource teachers to help them integrate reading skills into content instruction.

The first meeting in each month tended to be more theoretical, such as the importance of vocabulary in concept development, while the second tended to be

oriented to immediate application in the classroom, such as the development of vocabulary skills exercises. Following each workshop session, teachers had something to try out and evaluate before the next session. The sharing of results at each session was essential in drawing teachers together to bring about progress.

Conclusion

The literature on inservice education indicates that serious problems flaw traditional approaches to inservice teacher training. Hutson (1979) finds fault with the existing models and explains that while hard research on inservice is meager, there is near unanimous agreement that the current status of inservice practice is deplorable. Ingersoll (1976) concludes that "the viability and effectiveness of most inservice teacher training have ranged from gloom to despair."

Cooper and Hunt (1978) list the fact that teachers are seldom involved in planning inservice programs and assessing inservice needs as the first of the serious problems that flaw traditional approaches. The results of the Content Area Reading Program described in the following papers suggest that when content teachers are given the time to design, implement, and evaluate teaching strategies, the inservice experience may have a significant influence on teachers and students. McLaughlin and Marsh (1978) suggest that "the desultory status of staff development as education's neglected stepchild is changing." Models, such as the one described here, give added strength to the renewal process and accelerate the changing status of inservice training.

Content teachers' attitudes and behavior are not modified immediately. While intense inservice work can be accomplished in less than a year, implementation in the classroom implies a longer time frame. Meeting each student's reading needs -- as well as content needs -- is no easy task. Because this type of growth is slow, although important, the emphasis on content area reading should not be dropped if results are not evident immediately. It may take several years for teachers to feel comfortable with their new ways of teaching and confident that they are helping all students learn to read the materials in their content areas.

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